

Men and Books

ARCHIBALD PITCAIRNE 1652 - 1713

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IN 1927 DR. HAROLD COUCH of Toronto, who was then studying in Edinburgh, took me to tea at the home of Professor Lorraine Smith on Calton Hill. After tea our host took us into the seven acre park that is common property of the people who live in the tall stone houses that form a loop around the hill with this beautiful open space at their backs. A glorious view opened before us and we revelled in it regretting a haze that prevented our seeing Flodden which is visible from that point in clear weather. We talked of Old Edinburgh and I carried away one statement from Professor Smith: "No one has done justice to Pitcairne. He was less than two years in Leyden but he trained Boerhaave."

In the Academy of Medicine of Toronto I found most of the information contained in this essay. It would take more than one such effort to do full justice to Archibald Pitcairne.

Archibald was born in Edinburgh on Christmas Day in 1652. His father was Alexander Pitcairne a Baillie of the city. There is a Pitcairne castle near Leslie in Fifeshire about twelve miles north of Kirkcaldy and Archibald inherited a family estate which apparently had nothing to do with the castle. It was near Dysart on the coast of the Firth of Forth a few miles north-east of Kirkcaldy. In one of his lectures Pitcairne writes "Vomiting is cured by astringents and medicines which diminish excretion among which the most excellent is the water from the perpetual fountain at the town of Disart (sic) in Fife that noble and Chief Province of Scotland where the Pitcairnes have their patrimony."

The family was episcopalian, ardent Jacobites and valiant patriots. A lineal ancestor and his seven sons died at the battle of Flodden in 1515. In 1700 a letter of Archibald's fell into the hands of the government and he was arrested and imprisoned in the Tolbooth charged with breach of the statutes against "Leasing Making". His defence before the Privy Council was an abject acknowledgment of the offense and he asked to be forgiven as he had written the letter while in his cups. He was severely reprimanded and bound in a surety of £200 to refrain from further criticism of the reigning monarchs William and Mary.

In 1715 a son of Archibald joined the Pretender. He was taken prisoner at Culloden and lodged in the Tower of London. He was fortunate in having a friend at court. Richard Mead was Walpole's physician and he interceded for the young man. "If I have been able

to save your or any other man's life I owe it to this young man's father". Walpole arranged for the release of young Pitcairne who went to Holland and, shortly afterwards, died.

Archibald behaved discreetly but kept his political faith. When he died in 1713 he left a Jereboam* of wine "to be opened at the restoration". In the year 1800 the Fellows of the Royal College of Physicians raised a fund to restore the tomb of Pitcairne in Greyfriars Churchyard. When the work was completed Dr. Duncan ruled that this was the restoration mentioned in the will. The bottle was opened and consumed by the Fellows. "It was Malmsey and in excellent condition". The *Weekly Scotsman* of Dec. 24, 1952, notes that the Royal College of Physicians and the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh celebrated the tercentenary of Pitcairne's birth by placing a plaque upon an again restored tomb. There was no vinous reward for this act of piety. Mr. Jolley, in a commemorative lecture, said that to Pitcairne more than to any other man belonged the title of founder of the Edinburgh School of Medicine.

Young Archibald was educated in a school at Dalkeith and graduated M.A. University of Edinburgh in 1671. In obedience to his father's wishes he began the study of Divinity but soon abandoned it and turned to law. He applied himself so zealously to this new venture that his health broke down and he was sent to the south of France to recover. He broke his journey in Paris and, feeling quite well, he resumed his study of Law. He became intimate with some students of medicine and was impelled to a new venture in education and began to "walk the hospitals". This action was disapproved by his father who recalled him to Edinburgh. Here he had no desire to return to theology, law had lost its appeal and he was forbidden to study medicine. He therefore attached himself to Dr. David Gregory, Professor of Mathematics in the University and, under him, made great progress. He began to speculate on the application of mathematics in medical problems and in 1675 returned to Paris and began the study of medicine. He graduated M.D. from Rheims in 1680 and returned to Edinburgh. While in Paris he became friends with Bellini who was a disciple of Bordelli the first iatrophysicist. Later he took great satisfaction from letters in which Bellini approved his expositions of the Bordelli doctrines not knowing that he himself would be its last defender.

In Edinburgh Pitcairne took a large basement room under an inn in Parliament square. This inn was opposite the east windows of St. Giles Cathedral and was destroyed in the great fire of 1820. The entrance to it was by a stairway leading up from the street. Under this stairway was a door that opened on steps going down into

*A jereboam equals 2 magnums and a magnum is 2 bottles

Pitcairne's room which his friends jocularly described as "a greping office". I had trouble finding the joke in this description but through the kindness of Professor Dunn of the University of Toronto and some enquiries carried out for me in the University of St. Andrew's I conclude that visitors had to grope or feel their way into the dark room below. Here Pitcairne saw patients and entertained his literary friends. These entertainments must, on occasion, have been very jovial as the host would sometimes send home for a clean shirt before rejoining his family. Pitcairne was a very busy man. His medical practice grew rapidly and his reputation increased. He wrote in Latin and produced a volume on Criminal Trials. His lyrics were well received and Dryden translated his epitaph to Claverhouse. The great Doctor Johnson so modified his poor opinion of Scottish writers as to say that this poem was "very well". One of his poems, in quite a pious vein, is translated by the editor of a second edition of Pitcairne's lectures published in 1728. This would belie an accusation of atheism levelled at him in Edinburgh. The ground for this charge was the tone of at least one play and a number of poems in which he made coarse and scornful references to Presbyterian ministers. A volume of his poetry was published in 1725 twelve years after his death.

In 1681 on St. Andrew's Day the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh received its charter from King Charles II. The twenty-one fellows are listed, probably, in order of seniority. Sibbald is fifth and Pitcairne the last.

In the spring of 1685 Robert Sibbald who was already recognized as a physician, naturalist, and historian as well as being the originator of the botanical garden in a plot of ground forty feet square in Holywood, was appointed the first professor of medicine in the University of Edinburgh. The city council was evidently in a generous mood that year as, in September, Pitcairne and Halket were also appointed professors of medicine. As none of them had any students the appointments may be considered as compliments rather than as distinctions.

In 1688 Pitcairne published a pamphlet entitled "Solutio de Problematis de Inventoribus" in which he vindicated Harvey as the discoverer of the circulation of the blood. Chiefly because of this publication Pitcairne was called to Leyden as Professor of Medicine in the spring of 1692. Boerhaave, who graduated in 1693, doubtless sat under Pitcairne in 1692-93. The Dictionary of National Biography states that Pitcairne's lectures in Leyden were based upon the writings of Bellini of Pisa. Reading translations of some of these lectures gives the impression that, though they agree with Bellini's teaching, they were evolved from Pitcairne's own thinking.

"Toujours cherchez la femme!" Pitcairne was engaged to marry Miss Stevenson the daughter of a senior Fellow of the Royal College of

Physicians in Edinburgh. When he returned home in 1693 the lady firmly refused to go with him to Leyden. He outstayed his leave and was dismissed so he was married and resumed his abandoned practice. He never lectured in the University of Edinburgh.

In 1694 Pitcairne busied himself with the teaching of Anatomy. He thus became associated with the Royal College of Surgeons to which he was admitted as Fellow in 1701. For the next hundred years he was the only man to be a Fellow of both the Royal Colleges. Due to Pitcairne's influence the Royal College of Surgeons was granted thirteen cadavers per annum and demonstrations lasting eight to ten days were regularly given under the direction of Monteath. Pitcairne himself made dissections one of which is pictured beside one by Munro primus in the Wellcombe History of Scottish Medicine. In 1700 Monteath left the College to become a manufacturer of whiskey. Elliott was his successor and he, in 1705 was appointed Professor of Anatomy in the University of Edinburgh and became the first occupant of such a chair in Great Britain.

In the Royal College of Physicians Pitcairne was not so happy. He loyally supported his father-in-law Stevenson in a dispute over the conduct of examinations and in 1695 over the admission of Sir Edward Eizat to the fellowship. Early in that year Pitcairne had published a *Disputatio de Curatione Februm quæ per Evacuationes Instituitus*. In this he ignored Sydenham who is generally given credit for the idea. Eizat issued an anonymous refutation entitled "Apollo Mathematicus or the Art of Curing Disease by the Mathematicks etc. according to the Principles of Dr. Pitcairne". The Stevenson party failed and Pitcairne suffered a temporary suspension. More and more he leaned towards the surgeons and the chief fruits of his labours were the advances in teaching of Anatomy and the elevation of that science to Academic status.

With the passing of Pitcairne in 1713 the iatro-physicists ceased to be. Harvey had revolutionized the teaching of Physiology and the chemistry of digestion and of respiration was making stronger and stronger claims to recognition. The argument that a juice that would digest meat in a stomach must also digest the stomach itself was purely academic. The case against an interchange of gases in the lung was backed by experiment. Pitcairne wrote "I have joined the circulation of two dogs (no details of technique given) and choked one of them. That dog died as any other dog would have died. Were there anything in this absurd theory the breathing dog would have kept the choked dog alive".

It is a matter of speculation to suppose that Pitcairne ever became aware of the discovery of the capillaries or of the microscope. One of his earliest papers proved that *muscæ volitantes*

could not be due to opacities within the eye. He proved his point by an experiment with a submerged sphere and accurately estimated the focal point in a lens. It seems strange that he did not apply this knowledge. One would suppose that he would have been among the first to recognize the discovery of Loevenhock. He was a man of great energy and had a keen intellect. He is rightly held to be a chief stone in the foundation of the teaching of medicine in Edinburgh. Like many another he was under the domination of a single idea and his experiments were conceived to prove his own theories rather than to find the truth. The Royal Colleges in Edinburgh have done well by keeping a memory of Pitcairne alive.

UNIVERSITY NOTES

The following figures show the registration in Canadian Medical Schools for the year 1953-54.

	1st year	2nd year	3rd year	4th year	5th year	Total
University of British Columbia..	60	58	57	57	—	232
University of Saskatchewan....	32	32	—	—	—	64
University of Manitoba.....	61	64	65	77	61	328
University of Western Ontario (Special Students—3).....	59	57	61	60	—	237
University of Toronto (1st year, Premed.—128) (2nd year, Premed.—120)....	151	151	155	160	—	617
Queen's University..	64	59	60	64	59	359
				Sixth Year...	53	
University of Ottawa (Premed.—45)....	25	—	—	(Figures incomplete)	—	439
McGill University...	112	103	114	110	—	439
Université de Montreal.....	126	103	95	99	96	519
Université Laval (Premed.—122)...	139	120	85	135	135	614
Dalhousie University	58	54	52	49	53	266

MEDICAL SOCIETIES

WINNIPEG MEDICAL SOCIETY

The opening meeting of the 1953-54 session was held in the Medical College on September 17 with Dr. David Swartz presiding. Mr. C. F. W. Illingworth, Regius Professor of Surgery, University of Glasgow, gave an address on Gastro-intestinal Hæmorrhage. Several of those present had been taught by Mr. Illingworth in postgraduate study and all enjoyed his admirably clear exposition of the subject. He pleaded for a closer liaison between internists and surgeons and he thought that surgery was indicated in some cases, provided the surgeon was called early. Dr. Perrin thanked the speaker.

ROSS MITCHELL

THE N.B. MEDICAL SOCIETY ANNUAL MEETING

The seventy-third annual meeting of the New Brunswick Medical Society was held in the Algonquin Hotel at Saint Andrews, N.B. The Saint John Medical Society was the official host to the provincial body. Arrangements for the general meeting and ladies' entertainment were under the direct control of Dr. and Mrs. Stephen Clark, and they and their committees made this an unusually successful and friendly meeting even for New Brunswick, where medical gatherings have always been something special. Dr. Fred Whitehead, the secretary of the N.B. Medical, produced a program of quality in which all T's were crossed and I's dotted.

The officers for the new year, 1953-54, are as follows: President—Dr. E. F. Woolverton, Woodstock. First Vice-president—Dr. A. M. Sormany, Edmundston. Second Vice-president—Dr. W. Ross Wright, Fredericton. Treasurer—Dr. G. M. White, Saint John. Secretary—Dr. F. L. Whitehead, East Riverside.

Representatives of the Society to the N.B. Medical Council were: Dr. R. W. L. Earle, Perth; Dr. J. R. Nugent, Saint John; Dr. George Dumont, Campbellton; Dr. Ian MacLennan, Moncton; Dr. R. M. Pendrigh, Saint John. Dr. C. L. Cass of Sackville was re-elected to represent the N.B. Medical on the executive of the C.M.A.

A great deal of exploratory and constructive discussion took for its subject, "The General Practitioner or Family Doctor" pointing to the establishment of a college of general practitioners. In this connection it was suggested again that a medical graduate who intends to do a general practice, would learn more of the art and craft of his profession as an apprentice to a general practitioner than was possible as an intern in a big general hospital staffed by specialists. Another speaker stated that the G.P.'s college should be easy to enter but hard to stay in, meaning that a G.P. who did not keep up to date would be dropped by the college.

Dr. G. F. Skinner reviewed some recent trends towards state control of medicine and stressed that administration of medical care by lay personnel would lessen doctors' independence, individuality and patient doctor accord and would remove the self-imposed criticism of ourselves as doctors by ourselves.

The Medical Council of New Brunswick in its annual report to the Society reported an increase of doctors registered in the province, and stated that the number of applications of immigrant doctors from continental Europe for enabling certificates was increasing. Many of these applicants never thought of practising in New Brunswick, but were attempting to use the N.B. Medical Council as a back-door to practice in more industrialized parts of Canada. For this and other reasons the Medical Council of New Brunswick have recently passed the following regulations governing the granting of an enabling certificate:

(1) The physician applying for such a certificate must have passed a minimum of two years in basic science or premedical studies in a university approved by the Council. (2) He must have graduated from a Medical School approved by the Council. (3) He must be Canadian born, or (4) Born in the British Isles, or (5) Have acquired Canadian citizenship. The members of the society in session took exception to these regulations, particularly as to the rule requiring Canadian citizenship before being allowed to receive an enabling certificate. After a general discussion of this new set of regulations, the society recommended a re-consideration of the problem by the Council. This matter is receiving continued study by the Medical Councils of all the ten Canadian provinces and the Medical Council of Canada; and opinion among the several provinces has not reached a point where general agreement is yet possible.

Dr. A. D. Kelly, deputy General Secretary of the C.M.A., took part in the business sessions and presented an address on "Medical Care Security for Canada". Dr. G. W. Halpenny of Montreal spoke on two subjects: (1)